

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

THANKING THE SENATOR FROM PENNSYLVANIA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I very much thank my friend from Pennsylvania. As always, he is a gentleman as well as a great legislator and great leader. I meant those words very sincerely, unrelated to his yielding to me.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on year-end issues, we are staring down a litany of unresolved issues, and we are quickly running out of time to solve them. Not only do we need to pass an extension of government funding, but as I have said many times, we need to deal with budget caps, CHIP, community health centers, 702 FISA, a disaster supplemental, and of course the Dreamers.

I believe we could have resolved all of these issues had my Republican colleagues, especially in the House, not put them on the back burner while jamming through their tax bill. It is unclear still what the House is going to send us to keep the government open and whether it will be acceptable to the Senate.

At the same time, the House may move forward on an unacceptable disaster supplemental which still does not treat fairly California, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. It doesn't include, as best we know—they are still working on it—cost sharing for Puerto Rico and additional funding for Medicaid, mitigation resiliency, and drinking water infrastructure. While House Republicans included some tax provisions in the disaster supplemental, they failed to extend the ITC for Puerto Rico, extend the childcare tax credit consistent with other States, and the tax bill also includes a devastating new business tax that treats Puerto Rico as if it is a foreign country, which could encourage manufacturers to leave the island. This tax could cost thousands of jobs and decimate Puerto Rico's economy at exactly the time when Puerto Rico is hurting from the hurricanes and needs all the help it can get. Those issues must be fixed before a disaster supplemental can move forward. Because of these inadequacies, the disaster supplemental may have to slip to next year. I think we can work it out in a bipartisan way—I certainly do—but just jamming it through without consulting us and not being fair to so many other parts of the country doesn't make sense.

Unfortunately, we still have not reached a deal yet on the Dreamers, who are very important not only to my caucus, not only to some on the Republican side but to the American people.

They have overwhelming support. These kids were brought here very young, through no fault of their own. They learn in our schools, work at our companies, serve in our military, and pledge allegiance to our flag. They are Americans in every single important way but one—their paperwork. This is an issue we have a moral imperative to solve here in Congress.

Democrats want to make sure that we have equal bargaining, and we are not going to allow things like disaster relief go forward without discussing some of the other issues we care about that I have mentioned. We have to solve these issues together, even if that means passing a clean, short-term CR extension of government funding with some anomalies—we always understand there always have to be some anomalies but not those that change the structure—and continuing the negotiations into January.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. SCHUMER. Now, Mr. President, on tax. Earlier this week, the Senate passed one of the worst pieces of legislation in at least a decade, maybe longer. The Republican tax bill will go down in history as a rushed, sloppy, partisan rewrite of the Tax Code that benefited those who already have so much while doing little or hurting those who have too little. It will be remembered as throwing the extraordinary income inequality we see today into overdrive and fulfilling very few of the ambitious Republican promises about growth, job creation, and deficit reduction. But perhaps most of all, the Republican tax bill will define the Republican Party as the party of the rich and powerful, the party against the middle class, and that will be a rubric we will hear from now until next November and even further on.

Yesterday in the Oval Office, President Trump admitted that cutting the corporate tax rate was “probably the biggest factor in our plan.” Despite all his rhetoric about this being a middle-class tax bill, as soon as it passes, he admits that lowering the corporate rate was the Republicans' primary goal.

As corporations get a massive, permanent tax break, individuals will get small and temporary ones. By 2027, 145 million American families making under \$200,000—83 percent of the middle class—will be either paying more in taxes or get a cut of less than \$100. That is according to the Joint Committee on Taxation—no partisan affiliation. Meanwhile, the top 1 percent of income earners in our country will reap 83 percent of the benefits from this tax plan. Those facts are what make this bill so dramatically unpopular with the American people by a 2-to-1 margin in some polls, and next year the American people will have the opportunity to reject this bill and move our country in a different direction.

SPECIAL COUNSEL MUELLER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on Special Prosecutor Mueller, I want to take a moment to praise my friend from Virginia, Senator MARK WARNER, vice chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, for his speech yesterday about Special Counsel Mueller. It was an eloquent speech. I would like to associate myself with the substance of his fine remarks. If the President were to fire Special Counsel Mueller, our country would face a constitutional crisis. As my colleague from Virginia said, it would cross a redline. Additionally, there are steps below that brash and brazen act that would also cross redlines here in Congress, as Senator WARNER noted, including the use of the Presidential pardon on members of the Trump campaign who have been convicted, whether those pardons are intended to subvert the investigation or prevent testimony and further cooperation.

So I say to my colleagues, just as firing Special Prosecutor Mueller would cross a redline, so would pardoning people like Manafort and Flynn. The bottom line is this: President Trump must allow this investigation to proceed without a scintilla of interference. He would be wise to listen to Senator WARNER's speech yesterday and act accordingly.

THE REPUBLICAN-LED SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, Mr. President, since this is the last time I might be able to address this Chamber before the end of the year—let's hope so—I would like to look back at what the Senate has accomplished this year. The long and short of it, though, is that the Senate has not accomplished much to be proud of.

Despite winning only a slim majority in the last election—a condition that made this year ripe for cooperation between the parties—the Republicans used their power not to seek consensus or bipartisanship but, rather, to try to jam through a partisan agenda.

My friend the majority leader once promised that if he were ever given the majority, he would return the body to regular order. He cautioned against the Senate becoming an “assembly line for one party's partisan legislative agenda.” That is what MITCH MCCONNELL said a few years ago. Sadly, that is exactly what the Senate has become under his leadership this year. For a man who professed to love the Senate and relish bipartisanship, this is probably the most partisan Senate that I have served in in all the years I have been here, and we have departed from regular order and the customs of the Senate in ways never seen before. For what end? Well, this Chamber, under Republican leadership, has devoted itself to furthering the interests of the wealthy and powerful, while ignoring or harming the interests of the middle class and working America.

Republicans will argue that they had a great year, pointing to three things—Judge Gorsuch, the use of the Congressional Review Act to roll back regulations, and their tax bill. All three of those things help the rich and they will help corporations, but they won't help the middle class.

Senate Republicans engaged in historic obstruction to keep a Supreme Court seat open so the Heritage Foundation and Federalist Society could pick a Justice who would rule on the side of corporations instead of people.

Senate Republicans jammed through Congressional Review Act bills that rolled back protections for women, students, and workers, while lifting requirements placed on bad actors in the big oil, gas, mining, and gun industries.

They capped the year by passing a tax bill that provides huge tax breaks for the rich and biggest corporations, while providing crumbs and even tax hikes for the middle class.

They tried for months to repeal the Affordable Care Act, which would send costs soaring for millions of Americans and cause millions more to lose coverage.

They failed to fully authorize CHIP, the Children's Health Insurance Program, and failed to rebuild our infrastructure, despite the President's promises.

The stock market is up, but wages are flat or nearly flat. The President and Republicans promised that they would stop outsourcing, and that hasn't happened. Even companies the President said he would personally save have sent jobs to Mexico, leaving families in the Midwest and across the country without the income they need this holiday season.

Time and time again, the middle class was an afterthought or simply forgotten by Senate Republicans and President Trump. That has been the story of the year. Republicans haven't accomplished much, but what they have accomplished has only benefited the wealthy and well connected.

The Senate's record this year has exposed the faux populism at the center of President Trump's political identity. Although he rode into office promising to help the forgotten man and woman, those are exactly the people he has forgotten, abandoning them in favor of wealthy special interests. Populism, unfortunately, under President Trump, has been traded for plutocracy.

The millions of Americans in 2016 who were frustrated at a Washington that didn't work for them feel more frustrated today, and the millions of working men and women who voted for President Trump—many of them are already feeling betrayed.

We hope that the future will be different and that our Republican friends realize that their legislative and political goals are better served by bipartisanship and compromise rather than gridlock and strife. If they do, we are willing and ready to work with them, but if they don't, voters will have a

chance to move our country in a dramatically different direction in 2018. We are already seeing a yearning for that new direction in elections in Virginia, New Jersey, Tennessee, and even in deep red Alabama. If the Republicans continue to hurt the middle class and give handouts to big corporations and the wealthy, they are in for a reckoning next November.

I yield the floor, and I thank my colleague from Pennsylvania for his courtesy.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I want to thank the Democratic leader for his remarks.

When I was speaking a few moments ago about national security, I had made a suggestion to the administration that there is a national security strategy that has been outlined and that the administration reject the false choice between investing at home and engaging abroad and make sure that they utilize our diplomatic and development toolkits as much as if not more than they exercise our defense capabilities.

We have major challenges, and that is why I think it is important to outline this morning some of those challenges and some of our responses as we head into the new year.

Just for discussion purposes, I wanted to paint the picture of a nation that—it doesn't describe one nation, but I think we can imagine a country that fits this description or at least a number of countries that might. Imagine a sovereign state, a member of the United Nations, a nation whose leaders are singularly focused on staying in power and who will do anything to remain in power, including undermining their colleagues and erstwhile friends. In this country I am describing, those who speak truth to power are dismissed, ridiculed, or, at worst, treated as criminals. This particular country or profile of a country looks inward, putting its domestic troubles first as its reputation in the world declines. Out of fear of its near-peer competitors, the country retreats from diplomatic engagement and doubles down on military capabilities. Does this sound familiar? It might to some. It may describe a number of countries in whole or in part.

Of course, there are a number of countries that fit this description. Certainly, the dictatorial regimes that rule North Korea, Syria, and Iran prioritize self-preservation over the welfare of their citizens. In Russia and China, journalists and opposition leaders are regularly silenced, jailed, or worse.

Here in the United States, we are going through an especially turbulent chapter in the American story. As we celebrate the holidays, we might be dreading the inevitable political de-

bates with family members or friends whose views differ from ours. However, in that fictitious, oppressive country that I described earlier, you can't have these debates, or you can try, but you won't last too long because the authorities will come knocking.

That is what is great about our country. The United States is the land of the free and the home of the brave, and I am reminded of that every time I meet with servicemembers and veterans who are willing to put their lives on the line every day to defend our inalienable rights to criticize and to disagree with our leaders.

So what about this new strategy that the administration just outlined this week? This new strategy states, in pertinent part, that "America possesses unmatched political, economic, military, and technological advantages." That is what the strategy says, and that is certainly true. But I think we should add a few other advantages, even attributes, that are part of the American story, part of the American advantage.

Certainly, our history of generosity sets us apart from the world, a tradition of pluralism as well, the freedom to debate and dissent without fear, the respect for the rule of law, and finally a culture of innovation unmatched anywhere in the world. As I have said before, Americans don't wait for the future; we invent the future.

Through the execution of its strategy, the administration has an opportunity to invent the future of our Nation, as well as its role in the world—a future where the American economy is firing on all cylinders, where investments here at home lift up everyone, where our researchers and manufacturers lead the world in the production of cutting-edge technologies.

For the last 11 months, this administration has sent the world mixed signals about what "America first" really means, from pulling out of the Paris climate agreement, to threatening to walk away from NATO, to hollowing out the State Department. I believe the strategy implementation presents an opportunity to reverse that course. We cannot turn away from the world and try to go it alone. We should ask our allies, certainly, to pull their weight and pay their fair share. Whether it is NATO or the counter-ISIS coalition, the United States can always press our partners to do more, but not by threatening that we will abandon these alliances or by creating any uncertainty about these alliances. Simply put, we need partners to tackle some of the greatest threats facing our Nation and the world.

Let's go through a couple of them.

North Korea is first on the list. The North Korean regime is unpredictable and armed with nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the means to deliver them. Just across the demilitarized zone are tens of thousands of U.S. forces and our South Korean allies. Just across the water are more